

Punch Line

BY JEREMY SCHWAB

At the heart of Jamie Kaler's comedy is a fascination with life's blunders and bizarre moments. A stand-up comic and actor who plays Mike Callahan in the TBS sitcom *My Boys*, Kaler (CAS'87) says he likes to make people laugh, often at his own expense.

"I focus a lot on the dumb things that happen to me every day," he said during a recent trip to Boston. "To tell a joke and then someone laughs—it's the ultimate drug. I'm sometimes surprised I can make a living at it."

On a Friday evening in September, Kaler brought his routine before a packed crowd of undergraduates in the basement of the George Sherman Union, part of BU's Laugh Out Loud Comedy Series. He regaled the crowd with bawdy tales of romantic mishaps, BU misadventures, and insights into everything from the lottery to chimpanzees. He even made light of the age gap separating him from his audience members: "I'm at the age where I need to tell a woman I've been divorced, just so she thinks I'm capable of committing." Following the show, Kaler joked with fans and friends, clearly in his element.

While success may be coming more easily for Kaler now, it took him years to reach this high point. When he first decided he wanted to become an actor, he was living in California, working as a bartender, after five years in the Navy. One day, he auditioned for a Sea World commercial and got the part. That first experience—easy money and a chance to perform for an audience—was enough to get him hooked.

He soon discovered, however, that landing a part is not always so easy. For a while, he made commercials whenever he could. "I went to so many auditions and got rejected so many times," he reflects. "I think one of my best skills is that anytime I do fail, I learn from it. Each year, it's gotten better." Soon, Kaler started to get appearances on TV shows like *Will & Grace* and *The King of Queens*. He also got parts in movies, including *The Family Stone* and *Spanglish*, and performed in a few plays.

"The last couple of years, it's been amazing for me," he says. "You finally reach the point where you get to do what you want to do. But I still kind of feel as if I am pulling the wool over someone's eyes whenever I get a spot."

The success of *My Boys*, a sitcom about a tomboy sportscaster and her group of guy pals, may have surprised some people, but not Kaler. "I knew right away that the show was going to go," he recalls. "The chemistry's amazing on the show. We were hanging out from day one. We have a ball shooting it."

Now, *My Boys* is in its third season, and Kaler is making the most of his breakthrough success. He writes a popular *My Boys* blog and is touring the country to broaden the fan base for his stand-up show. He even landed a spot in the traveling comedy show "Blue Collar Comedy: The Next Generation."

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Acting was not Kaler's original career plan. He says that when he was a student at CAS, he had no idea he would wind up as an actor and comedian. He wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and join the Navy. He credits BU with continuing his personal development and introducing him to a broader world. Arriving on an ROTC scholarship, he was immediately struck by the energy on campus and the opportunity to meet all sorts of people.

"One thing I liked about the University was it's in a big city," says the New Hampshire native. "You didn't need to be in a frat; you were in the city of Boston. There were people of all different backgrounds, and you were just thrown in together."

The chance to interact with a wide range of people is part of what keeps stand-up comedy interesting to Kaler. He loves meeting fans, and can't imagine why anyone would be shy about approaching him in a crowd. "I went to Fenway Park last night and got recognized by a whole boatload of guys," he said during his most recent swing through Boston. "I am always amused by people who come up to me and say, 'I'm so sorry for intruding.' I'm glad people are excited about the show. If they weren't, I'd be back to bartending." ♦

